USAID/NICARAGUA

HURRICANE MITCH RECONSTRUCTION UPDATE

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USAID/Nicaragua Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program

(U.S. Millions of Dollars)	*$103.6*
Public Health	*30.1*
Economic Reactivation	*59.1*
Education	*4.5*
Municipal Infrastructure	*4.4*
Transparency and Accountability	*1.0*
Food Aid	*4.5*

Departments of Nicaragua Affected by Hurricane Mitch

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS HELPING NICARAGUA REBUILD

San Jose de Cusmapa, Nicaragua—

At about 1:15 p.m. everyday "The Micht" crosses the Tapacali River on its journey from San Jose de Cusmapa to the city of Somoto. The yellow passenger bus was baptized "The Micht" after its intrepid driver dared to traverse the then raging waters of the Tapacali after Hurricane Mitch destroyed the old wooden bridge.

"This bus is infallible," Moises Ordoñez the driver exclaims. "But I only did it once," he admits.

After that, "The Micht" had to temporarily forego its daily trip to San Jose de Cusmapa.

"We lost a lot of money," said the bus owner Victor Lagos. And the people of the mountain village of San Jose de Cusmapa, were left without transportation.

Soon after the destructive hurricane, under USAID's Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) began an investigation of damaged and destroyed bridges throughout the country. In coordination with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), a private voluntary organization working with USAID's Mitch program, the USACE identified 14 sites for bridge construction, repair or modification. In each case, the Corps of Engineers drew up suitable construction designs or recommendations that would provide safe bridge crossings utilizing the amount of donated steel beams that CRS had available.

"The Micht" now carries approximately 120 passengers on its round trip from Somoto to San Jose de Cusmapa since a bridge was built with the help of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and USAID.

The Tapacali Bridge is one of several designed by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers under the USAID Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program.

For the Tapacali River site, located about 30 kilometers south of the city of Somoto in the department of Madriz, the USACE decided that a 60-foot span ACROW bridge was the best design. The ACROW bridge is a

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U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS HELPING...

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prefabricated steel panel bridge widely used to cross small bodies of water. Developed by the U.S. Army to allow for rapid troop movements, the double-truss ACROW bridge can be assembled like an erector set in less than 24 hours.

With the new bridge, the town of San Jose de Cusmapa, located high in the mountains, now has transportation services.

The construction of the ACROW bridge in San Jose de Cusmapa took two days, as it was used as a learning seminar for 24 participants from the Nicaraguan Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MTI) and the Nicaraguan Army Corps of Engineers. The bridge materials were part of a donation to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Funding for the bridge design study, the seminar and a U.S. Army Corps expert to guide the work at the site was provided by USAID under the Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is also providing technical support and design inspections of several USAID reconstruction projects. A team of six USACE experts in dam safety performed thorough inspections of four facilities in Mitch-affected areas of Nicaragua. The USACE will provide designs for the repair of two dams that were severely damaged during Hurricane Mitch as well as training in dam safety and management.

With the ACROW bridge, both seminar participants and the community are pleased with the results. According to a U.S. Army Corps representative, with proper maintenance, the bridge will last for a long time. The Nicaraguans who worked on the construction now have the skills to build these type of bridges on their own. And the local population's connection to other towns and metropolitan centers has been restored.

"We had no means of transportation before the bridge was built. Now there are three bus routes," said Lester Benavides, as he waited for the 1 p.m. bus to Somoto to depart.

Also waiting to return home were sisters Itsia and Eslieth Ortiz. The bridge has provided new market possibilities for the two girls, who travel from the community of Las Sabanas to San Jose de Cusmapa every three days to sell the papaya candies that their mother makes.

For bus owners, the bridge has meant increased passengers and revenue. For the local residents the bridge has opened up markets for their farm products, job opportunities and access to public services such as health care and education.

Said bus driver Ordoñez: "We were really surprised. We didn't think it was possible to build a bridge so fast and this good".

While Yader Antonio Diaz is very pleased with the bridge, his horse is still getting used to the clattering sound of its hooves on steel.

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